

MCGILL DAILY CULTURE

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Wanna-bees since 1911.

Thursday, October 17, 1991

Sisters in the Struggle doin' it for themselves

by Kiké Roach & Lynn Chaiken

"I remember a white woman asking me how do you decide which to be — Black or woman — and when. As if she didn't have to decide which to be, white or woman, and when. As if there were a moment that I wasn't a woman and a moment that I wasn't Black; as if there was a moment that she wasn't white"

— Dionne Brand, "Bread out of Stone."

Dionne Brand, Toronto filmmaker, writer, poet and co-director of *Sisters in the Struggle*, stands out as a dynamic filmmaker, reconciling issues of race and sex. She is part of a new stream of Black women reclaiming a long-lost history and documenting realities too long silenced.

"*Sisters* is contemporary and confrontational. It is a complex and candid discourse among contemporary Black women activists," said Brand.

"Daily, I am struck by the brilliance and honesty of women with nothing to lose, which is what makes my obsession with the Black woman as subject a life-long project."

A first-time film about Black feminist's experiences in Canada, *Sisters in the Struggle* hit Montréal Wednesday during its cross-country tour. On hand at the Concordia screening, co-directors Brand and Ginny Stikeman fielded questions on tough issues that the film raises.

"Black women today can no longer say that they will deal with women's issues later. They have to

integrate sexism and racism within the women's movement, or else risk a whole section of the Black movement being imprisoned by sexism," said Brand.

Sisters in the Struggle, features women like Rosemary Brown, a 14 year British Columbia MLA; Carolann Wright, 1988 Toronto mayoral candidate and anti-poverty activist; Carolyn Jerome, a Vancouver based anti-apartheid organizer; and Amanth Bathalien, a Montreal based social worker. The film portrays women working in solidarity, organizing, demonstrating, petitioning, campaigning and speaking out for change.

"Every one of those women lives their politics. This film validates their struggles and their work," said Stikeman.

Resisting Violence

The film's focus on restrictive immigration laws and collective resistance to police violence is an outgrowth of these women's concerns and experiences.

"When the white world is asleep in this country, black women are working," says one woman in the film. Many of the women Brand interviewed challenged the structure of labour which systematically discriminates against black women. Black women are consistently forced into low-paying, menial jobs.

A significant influx of Black women into Canada came from the Caribbean in the 1970's to work as domestics. However, only unmarried and childless women were legally admitted. Women defying these criteria faced deportation.

These discriminatory laws were

ended only after nation-wide protest by the Black community.

Sisters in the Struggle delves further into the complexities of racism, sexism and violence by showing how these forces interconnect and compound in police violence. The women reflect on the 1989 police shooting of Sophia Cook, and discuss their feelings of shock and anger.

Sisters in the Struggle leaves its audience with a sense that Black feminists in Canada are empowered.

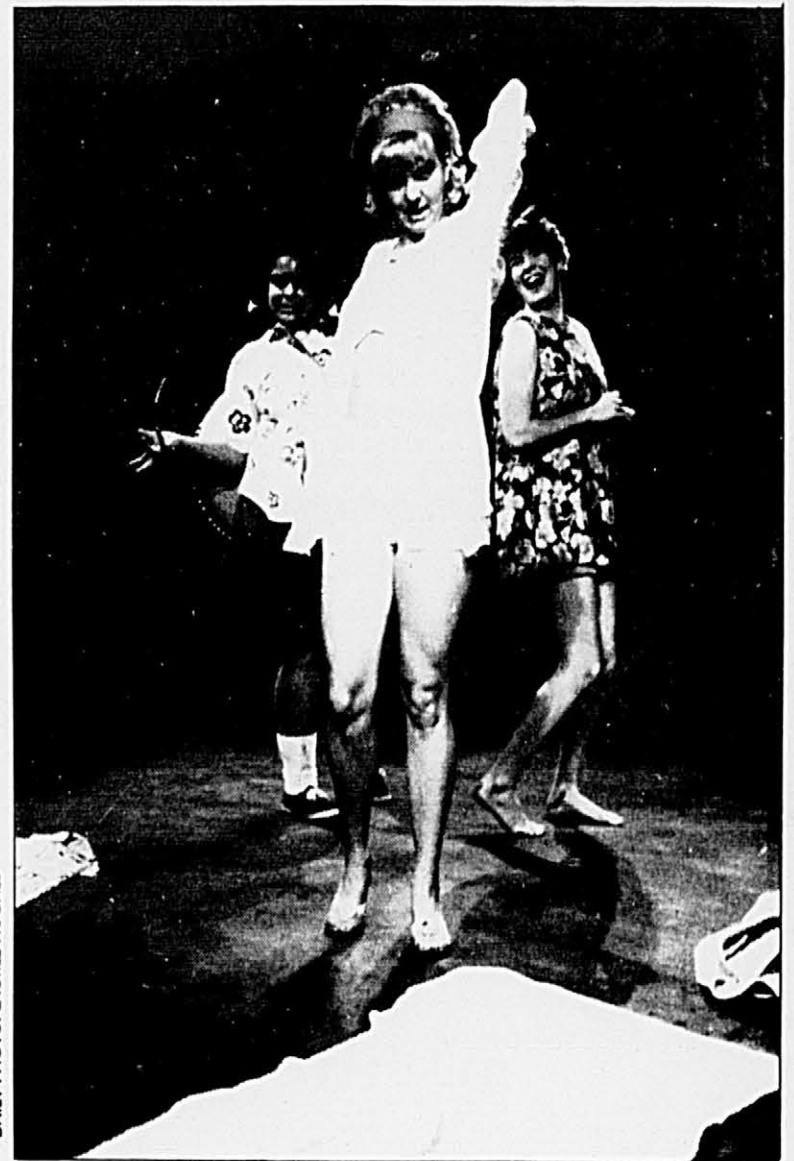
"I don't consider myself to be on the margin. I am at the center of the freedom I am creating," asserted Brand.

The second film in Studio D's "Women at the Well" trilogy, *Sisters in the Struggle* fills a chasm in Canadian history by highlighting the Black women's movement.

The *Women at the Well* documentary series is a trilogy tracing Black women's activism in Canada. Its first film *Older Stronger Wiser* is based on the experiences of early 20th century Black women.

The series title "Women at the Well" takes its historical significance, from a Ladies' Auxiliary group formed in Nova Scotia in 1917. The group was responsible for the African Baptist Churches' "spiritual, moral, social, educational, and charitable well being." But, lack of space inside the church forced the women to gather outside, around a community well.

Sisters in the Struggle and *Older Stronger Wiser* are available for viewing at the National Film Board, 200 Rene-Levesque Blvd. West.



DAILY PHOTO: LAUREL HUGHES

McGill Players' wanna B-Play festival

by Doug McDonald

When is a theatre festival not a festival? Why, when it has only two plays in it of course.

The McGill Players' Theatre might have done well to have billed this as a B-Play Double Feature, or maybe simply Two Plays With Loosely Connected Themes or Possible Interpretations (but how would you stick that on a poster?). Players' Theatre desperately wanted a festival so, a festival they called it.

Desperate is an operative word for the two productions offered in this festival. The first, *Women Behind Bars*, which opened last week and runs through next week, marks Paul Talley's directorial debut. Talley, despite working under tight financial restrictions and even tighter time restrictions, has thrown together a nicely acted little entertainment piece. The second, *Psycho Beach Party*, had its first full dress rehearsal a whole day before opening night (where one poor actor suffered a nose bleed).

Talley's play moves evenly, and is technically superb. The audience laughs at all the funny parts and the acting always feels on the mark. Still you can't help regretting that Talley didn't do a bit more research and reflection on the piece before he rehearsed it.

Though the original script isn't exactly laced with philosophical nuances, it has more potential than the final version reflects. The self-referential possibilities in the play could have given the presentation more dimension. Even with the stock writing, the characters could have been more alive, a little more campy and differentiated. Talley's technique is amazing, but his style, in a genre defined by style, seems to be missing.

On the other hand, Ali Drummond's *Psycho Beach Party* could have used a spat of technical help from Talley. At times characters walk around stage outside of the lights. This may be more a product of Drummond's concern for originality than of a lacking concern for technical perfection. The play transgresses, again and again, into the realm of organized disorder, bringing a raw excitement and immediacy to each scene.

Drummond captures a sense of post-modern absurdity in a play highlighting a psychotic, 15-year-old nymphomaniac and two gay surfers. The play's comic sequences are funny and twisted; sex scenes are hot and twisted; the rest is, well, just plain twisted.

Either show is well worth the six bucks, but if you're going to see *Psycho Beach Party*, remember to pack your sun tan lotion...it's supposed to be camp, after all.

Festival International de Nouvelle Danse

The mysteries of Subal-let

by Laura MacMillion

Does a performance of modern dance confuse me a little at times? Sure, I'll admit it, but that's the beauty of the art — my mind performs cartwheels to keep up with the dancer's acrobatics.

My classically conditioned mind was freed recently during a performance of *Les Mystères de Subal*, by Groupe Emile Dubois, at the Festival International de Nouvelle Danse. As choreographer Jean-Claude Gallota advised, if you "let your imagination loose, it will undoubtedly surprise you."

The performance, which seemed to begin at a table surrounded by people, evolved into a series of emotional representations centred around the Subalien paradise. "Subal speaks of shores, of ceremonies, of nostalgia, of voyage, of the beyond," explained Gallota. This sense of the beyond developed through both the movement of the dance and the music of on-stage musicians.

Dancers interacted with new age sounds, obnoxious guitar and a low background chanting. The dancers participated in the chant, which proved extremely effective during scene changes, as did a group-chant in front of a suspended chair. Bizarre.

Sprits of humour dotted the performance, in sync with sporadic interruptions that transformed the atmosphere from chaotic to moody and then back again. Comic relief ranged from one dancer doubling over in laughter during a funky drum scene to another flapping about the stage in a pair of briefs and dangly pom-poms. The hysterical male died laughing but was then reincarnated as a sexual klutz, also decked out in briefs and strategic pom-poms.

The dancers played out their personalities with the excitement and spontaneity of a roller-coaster in an electrical storm. Scenes changed dramatically from a turmoil of movement to, say, an accordion player and "O Amore" street singer serenading the passionate bond between two dancers.

Male and Female characters interacted with power and passion throughout the performance, off-set by a spry tom-boy character who popped out intermittently in brief explosions of youthful spirit.

The dance seemed so unplanned, I wondered at times if certain movements weren't mistakes, but such is the language of dance. As it ended I felt an overwhelming urge to trampoline my way home, until reality struck and I knew I wasn't in Subal anymore.

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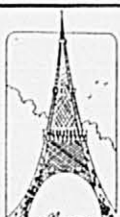
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Thursday, October 17, 1991

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McGill Association of Inter-
national Students free diner. 3484
Peel St. 18hr.

Yellow Door reading with
Mark Carter Walter Simon. 3625
Aylmer St. \$2 398-6243

Film Society Hair, F.D.A.
20:30hr.

Ukrainian Students Assoc.
elections/meetings new members
welcome. 550 Sherbrooke rm.
1175 931-7010 18hr.

Graduate Christian Fellows-
hip The drive to fulfill our full po-
tential Thomson House 1st floor
Back Lounge. 18:30-20hr

Friday 18th

McGill Film Society Lord of
the Lies, Leacock 132 19:30

McGill Christian Fellowship
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Yellow Door music by Robert
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1205 Docteur Penfield Avenue

Saturday 19th

McGill Film Society The God-
father, Leacock 132 19:30hr.



Strange noises vibrate from Victoriaville Festival

by Jeff Bell

Five consecutive days of new and challenging music was brought to a close Monday night with a spectacular performance by Japanese new music/performance group, After Dinner. This capped off the 9th edition of the *Festival International de Musique Actuelle de Victoriaville*.

After Dinner combined a theatrical sensibility with musical innovation in a seamless web of pieces that seemed to incorporate every conceivable genre. Traditional Japanese arrangements played alongside bluegrass, folk and experimental rock as members hopped from one instrument to another. Lead vocalist Haco captivated the enthusiastic audience with her original stylizations and expressive movements reminiscent of Noh theatre. A truly dynamic performance.

Many of the groups in this year's line-up defy categorization, straddling different musical genres and styles. The term *Musique Actuelle* was coined in the early 1960's to describe a new emerging form of music which was a strange hybridization of contemporary composition and free improvisation. The roots of this experimental approach can be found in the European avant-

garde as well as American jazz. Some important pioneers are John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Harry Partch and La Monte Young.

Every year in October, the small town of Victoriaville, best known for its hockey sticks and poutine selection (one diner boasted over twenty flavors), is transformed into a haven for new music lovers from around the world.

Continuing their tradition of aural eclecticism the festival delivered a veritable feast for the ears. This year's FIMAV featured twenty-five performances by groups from Canada, USA, Eastern Europe, Britain, France, Germany and Switzerland. This year also showcased a very strong Quebec presence with performances by Ambiances Magnétiques recording artists René Lussier, André Duchesne and Justine.

The goal of FIMAV is to introduce some of the most challenging and innovative artists working in the field of new music today. From the atonal glossolalia of Joan La Barbara to the frenetic bass calecthenics of Barry Guy, the festival covers a lot of musical territory. Where else but Victoriaville could you hear a string quartet named

Quatuor Balanescu doing Kraftwerk covers in the town's most sacred of churches.

Music, for the most part, is intended to take you elsewhere, to transport one out of the mundane into the realm of transcendental experience. In the two days I was at the festival a few artists succeeded in this metaphysical task. Trombone virtuoso Konrad Bauer, in his North American premiere, transported the captive audience with his multiphonic layering of sounds. Using a physically demanding technique known as circular breathing, Bauer created a majestic swirling of sonic textures that enveloped the concert hall. In another North American debut, Swiss power trio Hans Koch, Martin Schutz and Fredy Studer demonstrated why they are ranked as some of the hottest improvisers on the music scene today. Koch's squawking horns met Schutz's electric violin screeches on top of Studer's heavy metal bashing. It was glorious.

Non Credo brought their brand of quirky avant the times-rock meanderings to the stage, displaying humor and originality. It reminded me of a de-politicized Art Bears, as Kira Vollmann's striking vocals



FERDINAND RICHARD

DESSIN CECILE ROUX

recalled Dagmar Krause.

For those with curious ears, the FIMAV is a wonderful introduction into the world of musical exotica.

Those interested in musique

actuelle on disc should check out the Les Disques Victo record label featuring some of the best live recordings from Victoriaville performances of years past.

McGill's film fest offers glimpse of Japanese culture

by Mark Howe

Those who caught any of the four films that made up this year's Japanese Film Festival at McGill were treated to a quick glimpse at modern Japanese culture.

The festival was sponsored jointly by the East Asian Studies Department and the Consulate-General of Japan as a way to "promote better understanding of Japanese people and culture."

While the selection this year was somewhat limited — there were only six films from which organizers could choose — the festival had some excellent films. One of the better ones, and certainly the funniest, was *Free And Easy* by director Tomio Kuriyama.

The real title of this comedy, *Tsuri Baka Nishi*, translates as *Diary of a Fishing Fanatic*, but oddly enough in this case it is the English title which best captures the true spirit of the film.

The main storyline of Kuriyama's film is one Western viewers have probably seen before. A man strikes up a friendship with an older gentleman who he believes is out of work and in dire need of a little

compassion. It turns out that the older man is in fact the younger man's boss. This tension, of which only the viewer is aware, provides much of the comedy for the film.

The hero of the story is initially portrayed as a stereotypical Japanese businessman who barely has time for anything besides work, alcohol, and perhaps one hobby — be it fishing, baseball, or golf.

There are also a number of office scenes which show buck-passing to make even a McGill administrator's head spin; one tyrannical section chief actually counts his employee's yawns.

If this were all there were to *Free And Easy*, the film would hardly be worth watching. There is however a second level — Hamazaki's non-conforming behaviour.

In an early scene, his boss informs him that he is being transferred to the Tokyo branch. Rather than remaining silently compliant, Hamazaki immediately questions the decision and politely refuses to go — complaining about the noise, pollution and lack of fishing.

The effect is comic, but beneath it lies a critique of a society where hierarchical relationships in the

office make questioning a superior's orders virtually unheard of.

It's only a dream

A similar case arises when Hamazaki unknowingly meets Mr. Suzuki, the president of his company, in a cafeteria. Hamazaki's love of fishing and carefree lifestyle, which places work second to fis-

hing, appeal to Suzuki, who seems to be fed up with the office routine and blind subservience of his employees.

This is why the English title *Free and Easy* is so apt. According to Akira Matsubara, the Japanese consul in Montréal and organizer of the festival, "Many people would like to live exactly as the hero, but it's only a dream."

Hamazaki's attitudes, while appealing, are so unrealistically Japanese they are comic. When Suzuki calls Hamazaki at home earlier in the film, Hamazaki calls him "Suzuki-chan," as opposed to the standard *Suzuki-san*. The suffix "chan" is generally used for close friends, lovers, children, or pets.

continued on page 6

Pixies journey to a planet of sound

by Tien Lee

The Pixies are out and about again. They may not excite your average disco nut or hip punkster, but inconsistency seems to be their name and game. Their latest release *Trompe Le Monde* plays more pop-punk than most of us are willing to be used to.

Although *Trompe Le Monde* doesn't carry the spritely lyrics that once defined the Pixies, "Space [I Believe In]" and "Subbacultcha" carry an aggressive guitar that'll send your fairy ears a-flutter. Kim Deal's bass guitar has grown into a more rhythmic, less elementary beat,

though perhaps at the expense of its previous lulling simplicity.

The Pixies have surely brushed up on their distortion techniques, with less raw vocals and scrubbing chords. The result is a pasty mixture of Mudhoney with Depeche Mode — grinding indie beat with dancy digitals.

Side one tracks may be a bit laser lit, with the exception of "Planet of Sound," but vocalist Charles "Black" Francis' singing is still loony and tormented.

He follows the popular retrospective trend in the remake of William and Jim Reid's "Head-On." But in keeping with the Pixies' mysterious style, he dominates the

release with his own springy quirkiness. The likeness to Violent Femmes vocalist Gordon Gano is out of this world.

Francis has once again bundled together cleverly discordant lyrics on profundities such as the phallic symbol, in "Alec Eiffel," and romantic hedonism in, "Lovely Day." Still, they're no substitute for the sweet, lost harmony of previous releases.

Trompe should not be mistaken for Pixies' earlier fun runs, *Surfer Rosa* or *Doolittle*, which actually did a lot more for me. But it's worth a blank tape's penny just to hear the Pixies skip.

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Palestinians ignored in Mid-East peace talks

One night last week in East Jerusalem, a group of Jewish settlers, including four members of the Israeli parliament, broke into 26 Arab homes and claimed legal title to them.

One family was reportedly forced from its home at gunpoint. Members of another Arab family said they returned from an out-of-town wedding to find the settlers in their house.

Bruce Fudge

The forcible seizure of Palestinian homes not in itself unusual. The latest settlers in East Jerusalem join some 250 000 Jews who have moved into the lands Israel seized in the 1967 war.

What gives the settlements added significance now is that they occur during American efforts to convene a peace conference to address long-standing disputes in the region.

Israel and the United States, its long-time backer, are increasingly at odds over the Israeli policy. And while the world's attention focuses on the dispute between Israel and the U.S., the people at the very centre of the conflict say they are being overlooked.

Palestinians charge that the official debate surrounding the peace conference has reduced them to being a technical difficulty in the peace process. All they can hope to do is wring some marginal concessions from this new turn in U.S.-Israeli relations, Palestinians fear.

The Arabs of the West Bank and Gaza, including their representatives abroad, are at a critical stage in their existence as a people. Many believe they are faced with little choice but to submit to humiliations such as being told who may speak for them at the peace conference, and which topics may be discussed.

And of the other parties at the negotiating table — Syria, Jordan, Israel, the U.S. — none have displayed any particular love for the Palestinians.

According to Rabbi Ronnie Fine, a McGill chaplain and an ardent Israel supporter, the Palestinians' future is their own problem.

"Peace in the Middle East is not a question of 'what's right'. It is a question of the self-interest of the Jewish people of the state of Israel," he says.

U.S. leverage

The idea of a peace conference is not a new one.

Almost all the countries now at the table may want such a conference, but a conference never materialized in the past because of constant opposition from the U.S. and Israel.

Rachad Antonius, of Montréal's Centre d'études arabes pour le développement (CEAD), says the United Nations has supported the conference idea since 1983.

"By 1989, all member countries including Canada voted in favour, with two exceptions — the United States and Israel," he says, noting that the original idea was to have

direct participation by both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The up-coming conference will likely exclude an official Palestinian delegation.

Antonius says the peace conference is going ahead now because the U.S. has become the only global superpower, and can use its leverage to impose a solution to its liking in the region. Also, the Palestinians' former Arab supporters are coming to recognize the new balance of power, and are courting the U.S.

"The only reason a peace conference may finally take place is that the Palestinians are crushed," says Antonius.

Observers say Israel, too, will have to come to grips with the new power balance — although the Jewish state does have a long history of U.S. financial and political support. In the last decade alone, the U.S. gave Israel over \$20 billion in aid, half in military aid.

Still, it has taken no time at all for the U.S. and Israel to clash over the continued building of settlements. In preparation for the peace talks, the only demand the Americans have made of Israel is that it hold off on settlement construction. Israel has refused.

More clashes have resulted from a recent decision by the U.S. Congress to delay \$10 billion in loan guarantees requested by Israel. Palestinians cautioned that the U.S. has merely postponed the loans, but the delay has nonetheless caused an uproar in the Jewish state.

The tensions between the two allies may come as a surprise to some, but in fact the U.S. policy is perfectly consistent.

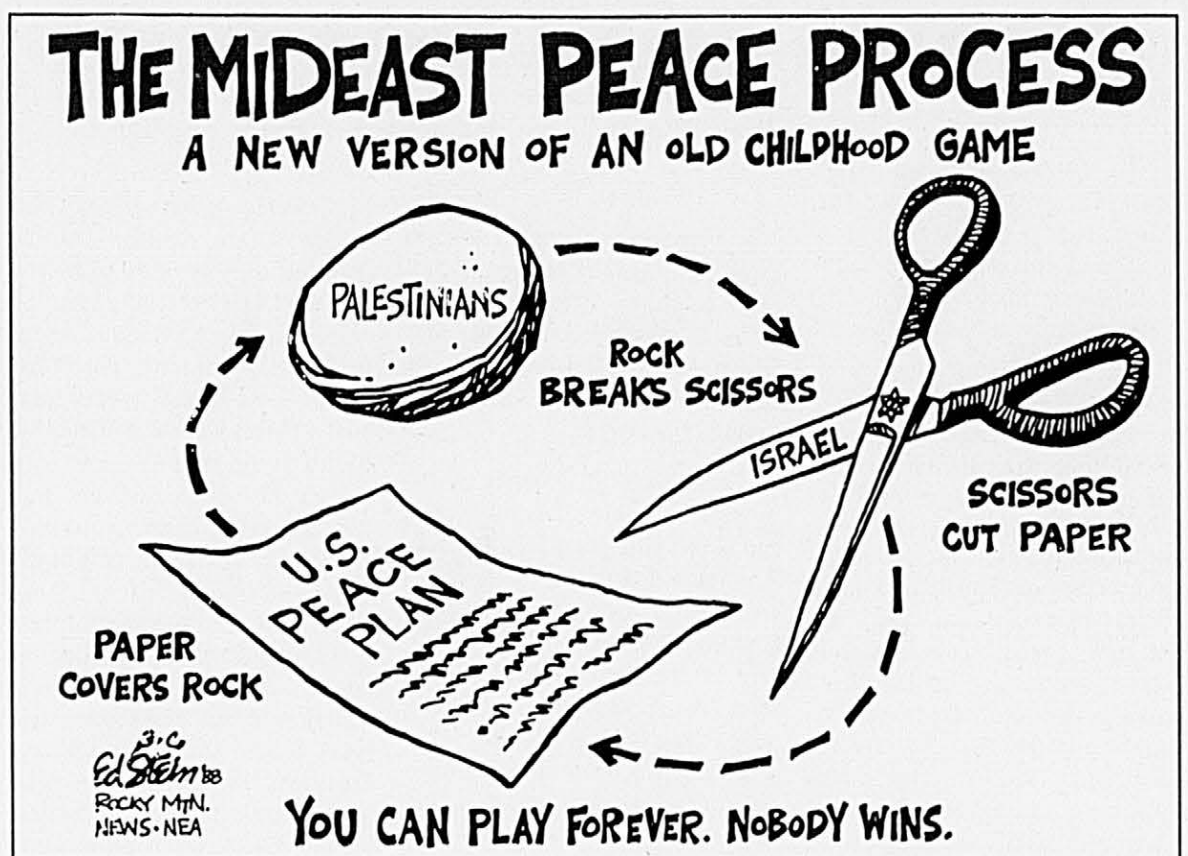
In the wake of the Cold War and the Gulf conflict, Israel's importance as a strategic American ally has diminished.

According to Howard Skutel, a Montréal freelance writer and contributor to the London-based *Middle East International*, the loan delay has little to do with the fact that the money would have paid for further settlements in the occupied territories, and the fact that the settlements are a violation of international law. The delay has everything to do with America asserting its power in the region, he says.

Israel's refusal to stop settlement construction is "like an affront to U.S. masculinity," Skutel says.

"It must be a slap in the face for (secretary of State James) Baker every time he arrives in Jerusalem and sees a new settlement going up."

Skutel also said the Israeli obstinance feeds an increasing frustration among Americans who are tired of giving Israel over \$3 billion a



year in aid.

Huge support

But views differ on whether American public opinion will take Israel's side in the dispute.

Reuben J. Poupko, chair of the Israel Action Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress, maintains that morality is on Israel's side, and therefore so is Western public opinion.

"Israel enjoys huge support from the North American people — and that's people in general, not just Jews," Poupko says.

"Of course, the pro-Israel lobby is one of the most powerful. There's a simple reason for that — the justice of their cause."

But Poupko says any chance for a successful peace conference was destroyed by president Bush's demand for the cessation of settlements. "Israel gained the (occupied) territories in war, which is perfectly legitimate. The Arabs tried to drive the Jews into the sea, and they must pay for that."

The U.S. demand is an unreasonable pre-condition for the peace conference, Poupko says. "It would set an unfair precedent if Israel were to agree to such a condition. The status quo must be maintained until any negotiations take place."

But the status of the status quo is less certain for many Israelis.

Many Israelis are worried that they will be forced to give up the territories, and have undertaken an unprecedented frenzy of settlement construction there.

Since just February, seven per cent of the entire West Bank has been seized for Jewish settlements, say CEAD statistics. In all, 65 per cent of the West Bank and Gaza has been confiscated for the use of Jewish settlers. Nearly two million Palestinians are crammed into the remaining 35 per cent of the land.

The settlement-building blitz coincides with the end of the war in the Gulf, and a time when U.S. influence is at an all-time high in many Arab capitals. Actions such as last week's housing grab in East Jerusalem are often a direct response to

the shifting balance of power in the region. One of the settlers involved said as much to reporters; the seizure, he said, was intended to send a message to secretary of State James Baker in anticipation of his current visit to Israel.

"And we will do it again before the peace conference, during the peace conference and after the peace conference," Eliakim Ha'etzni, a Knesset member from the far-right Techiya party and one of the settlers, recently told the *Globe and Mail*.

Futile cause

The Gulf conflict revealed a distinct divergence of opinions on the Palestinian question between Arab leaders and their populations. The divergence was most evident in North Africa, where the firmly pro-Iraqi popular sentiment clashed with the more ambivalent stance of government leaders.

Ironically, the U.S. seems more pro-Palestinian on some issues than the Arab countries involved in the up-coming peace talks; the U.S. is the only country involved which openly links the settlement issue with the peace talks.

"For the Syrians, the issue of the Golan Heights is much more important than that of the territories," CEAD's Antonius says.

And, he says, the Palestinians will likely lose out if the interests of Syria, the U.S. and Israel coincide.

Antonius says that if Israel is faced with receptive Arab neighbours, it will use a "bilateral approach," in the hope of achieving a Camp David-type agreement. Under such an agreement, Israel would sign formal treaties with each of its Arab neighbours; Palestinians would be left out, and the status of the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza would

be sidestepped.

Such a situation leaves the Arabs of the occupied territories desperate.

A peace conference will likely offer Palestinians some very limited form of municipal autonomy — what some Palestinians derisively refer to as "garbage collection."

"The Palestinians will of course go to a peace conference," says Antonius. They have nothing to gain, he says, because they will be forced to accept what Israel and the U.S. are willing to offer. But they have nothing to lose either, he says, and at least this way they can say to the world they were willing to negotiate. Delegates to a recent congress of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Algiers voted overwhelmingly to participate in the peace conference, despite the large number of humiliating pre-conditions for the talks demanded by the Israelis.

Abdul-Malik al-Jabir, former president of the Canadian section of the General Union of Palestinian Students, says Palestinians living in the occupied territories are especially in favour of attending the talks because their present situation is so miserable. "We have no choice. You can't talk to people about principles when they are hungry."

But al-Jabir despairs that the world has abandoned the Palestinians. "Maybe if they lived under our conditions, they would see."

Such words fall on many deaf ears. "First and foremost, the Palestinians must try to be peaceful people," says McGill's Rabbi Fine. "Then maybe things may be worked out." As for something concrete which the Palestinians could do or offer to Israelis: "There's nothing really, I suppose."



Fear and Loathing in McGill prof's heart

by Carrie Hintz

Former McGill professor Paddy Webb has recently published a book of poems called *Woman Listening: Selected Poems* dating from 1963 to the present. The cover of this slim volume shows the face of a woman in silhouette: an appropriate image for poems as self-revealing as Webb's. They are portraits that "trace a woman's emotional and psychological development". Her work addresses a remarkable variety of concerns: the terrors of the surgical ward, the experience of motherhood and the intricacies of gender politics are only some of the subjects which Webb touches on.

Webb's rich and musical language creates poems which are ideally suited to be read aloud. Her images are fine-tuned and subtle. She takes the natural world as a source for her writing: in "Air as Structure," she envisions a world where air becomes her fear and even terror. Her poem "Victim" contains solid, descriptions of fear and even terror which abound in Webb's work.

*Interposing itself
between things- dividing
and isolating, concentrating
on the shapes it made and playing
with light and shadow.*

Even the natural world which she relies on so heavily for her work seems uncertain and threatening at times. In "Fiddleheads," she writes, *there is a hostile power in these ferns*

the force of live thing coiled ready to strike-

Her final poem, "Vespers" forms an uneasy yet compelling closure with its dark imagery of shadows and stars which "rick the world's closed lids."

My overall impression of the

book is of a poet who, although writing about fear, is not afraid to write in a confrontational tone. In "Gender," she writes,

*"You use woman as a river
whirlpooled with trickery- a spawning place-
deceitful in deliberate currents
and eelgrass to snare you."*

The tone of this poem is almost accusatory, made all the more effective because it is accompanied by her usual careful attention to craft. The sing-song effect of the



opening lines of "Pill Time" forms a chilling contrast with the poem's

message:

*this weird state, I tell
the time by the pills I take:
one for loving, two for lying,
three for pleasure, four for dying.*

Webb's unflinching honesty translates into powerful and affecting poetry well worth reading.

Paddy Webb has been published by several Canadian anthologies and by Delta Press, Priapus Press, and Quadrant Editions. The book launching took place at Paragraphe Bookstore on Wednesday, October 16th.

Fisher King fishing for compliments

by John Tinholt

Terry Gilliam tells allegories: complex, detailed, fully-realized, too often provoking the critical refrain, "Too much!" Conventions of the genre require breadth of imagination, and encourage corresponding breadth of emotion. In the realist (or at best magic-realist) context of *The Fisher King*, the latter comes out hokey. Too many I-love-yous, too many happy endings.

Realist film, even the magic variety, is inappropriate to Gilliam's narrative style. Fantasy as a kind of surrealism of convention taps into a latent mythological story-telling

structure that lets the tale proceed illogically, the characters play out their role in the allegory.

In *The Fisher King* the fantastic necessarily comes out in the text and the dialogue. Any damn fool petticoat balloons, flaming knights, gold-plated Icaruses, and time-travelling dwarves are tethered strictly to the imagination by the movie's 1990s Manhattan setting. Stories are told instead of shown, opinions lengthily expressed instead of tossed off. In his previous outings Gilliam's manic visual imagination translated easily; the story was the movie, the meaning was the story.

Clearly Gilliam has pressured

himself, or has been pressured, into making his message more "accessible". Brazil almost never saw daylight in North America precisely because Universal Studios found it inaccessible. In the *Fisher King*, read "obvious," even "ham-handed". That the stories are engaging, and the opinions expressed vividly, does not redeem their very existence in the film.

Thus we arrive at the crux of criticism the film has received. Gilliam's suit of realism fits too tight. From beginning to end the movie tells us it should have been an allegory, should have been Gilliam's trademark fantastic fiction told to

make a humanist point. Realism cripples it. The point then, dressed up in its three-piece Versace, is subverted precisely by the new clothes designed to sell it. This can be disappointing, even infuriating. Some call it selling out.

My own view is that any specific problems you have with the movie should be placed in this perspective. The movie holds itself up as particularly good—morally redeeming. Certainly *The Fisher King* is morally ambitious. But it's too flawed in ways other than morally to be very good at moral redemption.

The words, the writing, for all its inherent fault as writing in a Gilliam film, does manage sustained brilliance. It's good to hear somebody swear as vaguely and constantly as I do. The dialogue is easily witty and real, the humour and pathos never inadvertent. Central characters each have their distinct idiom, which contributes to one of the film's basic strengths: it's human-positive, both personally and politically.

Characterization is vivid. The only perceived group receiving unequivocally negative treatment is less a group than the attitude of self-absorption, which, the film says, generates painful dissatisfaction with any degree of luxury, wealth and power, and makes any human relationship a pitiless, damaging, sham.

This film is disenfranchised-positive. This includes women (though not, in its mythologic/poetic terms, feminism), gays, the physically and mentally disadvantaged, and the homeless. At the same time, no central character behaves irreproachably; there are no martyrs in this film because there are no causes. Victims are victims of human fucked-upness, and they all suffer to a degree, the white males among them not the least. But enough ideology.

Gilliam responded to *The Fisher King's* reception at the Toronto Festival of Festivals of the People's Choice Award with a comment to the effect that it at least made selling out less painful. It's an indication of Gilliam's commitment to his message that it survives so well the Hollywood mangling of his style, and a testament to the organic integrity of the work that the message depends so deeply on his idiom.

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Japanese Film Fest

continued from page 3

When Hamazaki finally discovers Suzuki's true identity he breaks off the friendship. Despite being un-Japanese in so many ways, he realizes that an irreversible breach in etiquette has occurred.

Shortly thereafter Hamazaki is offered a transfer back to the seashore, which he gladly accepts. On the train back to the coast, he repents and calls Suzuki, but their reconciliation at this point seems a token gesture. There is simply no way that they can resume their old friendship while Hamazaki works for Suzuki's company.

From the Western viewpoint the ending is somewhat unsatisfying, almost a cop-out. For the Japanese, however, an extremely difficult situation has been resolved without loss of face on anyone's part. This makes it the perfect ending.

Free And Easy is an excellent look at the Japanese way of life. While it is often no more than a slapstick comedy, it operates on deeper levels which reveal not only some cultural norms in Japan and the problems they can cause, but also the dreams of transcending these norms and living a life that is truly free and easy.

Free and Easy is available on video at your local international video outlet.



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